



AGENDA ITEM: 6(i)

CABINET: 12 JUNE 2012

Report of: Borough Treasurer

Relevant Managing Director: Managing Director (People and Places)

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor A Owens

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SUBJECT: HIGH STREET INNOVATION FUND

Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide details on a new government grant that has recently been announced.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

2.1 That the Borough Treasurer in consultation with the relevant portfolio holder be authorised to take all necessary action to apply the High Street Innovation grant to the proposed uses set out in section 4 of the report where feasible and appropriate.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 The Council has recently been awarded a one off sum of £100,000 from a new Government High Street Innovation Fund to support local High Streets. This funding is linked to the Portas Review, which has helped to identify what government, local authorities, businesses and communities can do together to promote the development of new models of prosperous and diverse high streets.

- 3.2 100 authorities have each received £100,000 from the £10m total fund with a stated aim to support empty properties on high streets. This grant is not ring fenced and consequently the Council can determine how best to use this funding.
- 3.3 Local business rate information shows that there are currently 803 retail units in the Borough of which 95 are currently empty (12%). These empty units are primarily in Ormskirk, Skelmersdale and Burscough.

4.0 PROPOSED USES OF FUNDING

4.1 The fund provides an opportunity to deliver innovative local approaches to managing and revitalising high streets, using the range of tools available to local partners. Consequently it is proposed that the fund is used for the following initiatives:

- To support the Portas Pilot in Ormskirk – Local Businesses have recently submitted a bid for funding to the Government and the Council has agreed to act as the Accountable Body for this bid. This bid is also supported by a wide range of partners including Edge Hill University, West Lancs CVS and the Local MP. While this bid has not been successful in the first round, a second round is now underway that will see 12 additional pilots announced by the end of July. It is proposed that funding will be provided to enable elements of the pilot to begin as soon as possible based on negotiations with the Portas Pilot partnership
- Developing a scheme for the Concourse following discussions with the Concourse management. This funding could be used as a catalyst to develop, in partnership with the owners of the Concourse, measures to reduce vacancy rates and it might also stimulate further investment and refurbishment works
- Develop a scheme to provide business rate discounts for new start up businesses taking on empty properties. Local authorities now have the ability to develop these schemes following the enactment of the Localism Act 2011. The Council would work with landlords and encourage them to contribute to the business rate discount - this could involve match funding or providing other resources, and this would be in the landlord's interest if it means their empty property becomes occupied.

4.2 The exact nature of these initiatives will depend on discussions with partners, but the following principles will be employed in developing these schemes:

- Enliven the high street to bring in more footfall and deliver measures to fill empty shops
- Where possible attract match funding to make the government grant go further and work in partnership with other organisations

- Ensure that a visible output is produced in a reasonable time scale
- Be achievable within the officer resources available

5.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

5.1 The proposed initiatives set out in this report will promote enterprise, innovation and attract inward investment. They will also promote a positive image to investors and visitors. They will then contribute to the corporate priority of focussing on sustainable regeneration and growth within the Borough.

6.0 FINANCE AND RESOURCES

6.1 The cost of the proposals will be contained within the £100,000 grant funding that the Council has received for High Street Innovation.

7.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

7.1 There is a risk that this grant announcement could create unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved, and while the £100,000 grant funding is welcome it is a relatively small sum given the scale of the local economy. For example the Council collects around £27m in business rates each year from local businesses. However this new funding stream creates a positive opportunity to address high street issues within the Borough.

7.2 There is also a risk that it may not be possible to implement some of the proposals set out in section 4. This is partly because they will be dependent on discussions with third parties. It is also because developing new and innovative initiatives is more difficult than using tried and trusted approaches.

Background Documents

The following background documents (as defined in Section 100D (5) of the Local Government Act 1972) have been relied on to a material extent in preparing this Report.

Ormskirk Portas Pilot Bid – March 2012 (Available from the Technical Services Manager)

Equality Impact Assessment

There is the potential for a direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Consequently an Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared and is attached as an Appendix. The results of this assessment have been taken into account in the Recommendations contained within this report

Appendices

1. Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix - Equality Impact Assessment – High Street Innovation Fund

<p>1. Using information that you have gathered from service monitoring, surveys, consultation, and other sources such as anecdotal information fed back by members of staff, in your opinion, could your service/policy/strategy/decision (including decisions to cut or change a service or policy) disadvantage, or have a potentially disproportionately negative effect on, any of the following groups of people:</p> <p><i>People of different ages – including young and older people</i></p> <p><i>People with a disability;</i></p> <p><i>People of different races/ethnicities/ nationalities;</i></p> <p><i>Men; Women;</i></p> <p><i>People of different religions/beliefs;</i></p> <p><i>People of different sexual orientations;</i></p> <p><i>People who are or have identified as transgender;</i></p> <p><i>People who are married or in a civil partnership;</i></p> <p><i>Women who are pregnant or on maternity leave or men whose partners are pregnant or on maternity leave;</i></p> <p><i>People living in areas of deprivation or who are financially disadvantaged.</i></p>	<p>Monitoring information is not collected and compiled on Businesses and Landlords in the Borough. However, there is no indication that the recommended initiatives would disadvantage, or have a potentially disproportionately negative effect on any of the protected groups. The initiatives would be equally accessible and available to all businesses and/or landlords.</p>
<p>2. What sources of information have you used to come to this decision?</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>3. <i>How have you tried to involve people/groups in developing your service/policy/strategy or in making your decision (including decisions to cut or change a service or policy)?</i></p>	<p>As yet there has been no engagement but, depending on which initiative(s) is chosen, businesses and landlords will be invited to contribute.</p>
<p>4. <i>Could your service/policy/strategy or decision (including decisions to cut or change a service or policy) help or hamper our ability to meet our duties under the Equality Act 2010? Duties are to:-</i></p> <p><i>Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;</i></p> <p><i>Advance equality of opportunity (removing or minimising disadvantage, meeting the needs of people);</i></p> <p><i>Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it.</i></p>	<p>It could help by fostering good relations in the community, particularly those involved with their local high streets.</p>
<p>5. <i>What actions will you take to address any issues raised in your answers above</i></p>	<p>Appropriate arrangements will be made to ensure that all interested parties are aware of this initiative and can become involved or benefit from them, for example by providing information on the initiatives in a range of languages and Braille.</p>

